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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 3690  
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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: FILM CHALLENGES GOI VERSION OF EAST TIMOR INVASION  
AND DEATHS OF FOREIGN JOURNALISTS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Indonesian censors have voted to ban the Australian film "Balibo," which alleges that Indonesian troops deliberately killed five foreign journalists during the 1975 invasion of East Timor. The ban may not be legally enforceable and activists have already screened the film in Jakarta. The GOI maintains that the journalists died in a crossfire between Indonesian forces and Timorese rebels. Indonesian activists have condemned the ban and some legislators have called for hearings. The ban may also cause friction in Indonesia-Australian relations, especially given an Australian police decision to reopen an investigation into the journalists' death. END SUMMARY.

CONTROVERSIAL FILM BANNED, SORT OF

¶2. (U) The Indonesian Film Censorship Institute (LSF) has voted to ban the Australian film "Balibo," which depicts Indonesian troops deliberately killing five foreign journalists, including two Australians, two British and one New Zealander in 1975. A GOI investigation maintained that the five were killed during the invasion in a crossfire between Indonesian troops and Timorese rebels. However, LSF officials have not yet signed documents finalizing the ban, a fact which prevents the police or prosecutors from enforcing it.

¶3. (U) A Department of Foreign Affairs (DEPLU) spokesman said the LSF acted on the basis of established guidelines and that the government had not intervened in its deliberations about the film. Several current and former military officials hailed the LSF decision and said that the film was an inaccurate portrayal of historical events. Although they had scheduled showings, the Jakarta Foreign Correspondents' Club and the Jakarta International Film Festival both decided not to screen the film in order to not further enflame the controversy. However, the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) screened the film three times without incident.

SWIFT REACTION

¶4. (U) Journalists and civil society groups condemned the LSF's action. Ezki Syuanto of the AJI said that such a ban had no place in a democratic Indonesia. She charged that the LSF acted under political pressure and questioned official claims that there was popular support for banning the film.

¶5. (U) Parliamentarians also weighed in on both sides of the issue. Legislator Eko Hendro Purnomo, a former comedian and member of a parliamentary commission responsible for arts and culture, labeled the ban "paranoid." He called on

legislators to hold hearings to question Culture and Tourism Minister Jero Wacik and LSF officials over the matter. However, Kemal Stamboel, chairman of the parliamentary commission on foreign affairs and defense, defended the ban. He said the LSF acted correctly in banning a movie that might offend the Indonesian public.

#### POTENTIAL BILATERAL ISSUE

¶6. (C) If it continues, the controversy over the film may cause difficulties in Indonesia-Australian relations. Many Indonesians resent Australia's support for East Timor's independence and remain very sensitive about the matter. The decision to ban the film came two months after an Australian police decision to reopen an official investigation into the journalists' death. That move came after a coroner's inquest found that the five had been intentionally killed, a finding the GOI categorically rejects.

HUME